

# ELECTIONS IN WARSAW, NEGOTIATIONS IN BRUSSELS

## POLISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

*Christian Schmitz / Agnieszka Łada*

For Germany's eastern neighbour, Poland, 2011 was a year of challenges and tests. The government in Warsaw had to cope with holding the Presidency of the EU for the first time since joining the Union. This new experience came at a time when the European sovereign debt crisis had suddenly reached unprecedented proportions. Despite this, Poland proposed an ambitious agenda for the period of its EU Presidency, which it would have to implement at the same time as holding its own national elections and the ensuing period of forming a government. The end result was success for the Polish government: it not only won the elections but also served a positive and professional term as Presidency of the Council. Perhaps both challenges were met so successfully because the Polish officials managed to strictly separate the Presidency from the election turmoil back home.

### BACKGROUND

Right from the outset, the main protagonists in Warsaw were in a good position to successfully handle the difficult challenges they faced. The previous four years had been a relatively stable period for Poland in terms of domestic politics. The government of the liberal conservative Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) and the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), led by Donald Tusk, had, admittedly, shelved many planned reforms, but they had still guided the country successfully through the financial and economic crisis. By the end of



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2009, Poland was the only country in the EU that was enjoying any economic growth. Skilful use of money from the EU Structural Funds was one of the key factors behind this success. Another important reason was that the Smolensk disaster on 10 April 2010, in which the President Lech Kaczyński and many representatives of the Polish elite were killed in a plane crash, had not seriously affected the functioning of the Polish state. The country's stability was also helped by the fact that, in Donald Tusk, Poland had a head of government who, for the first time since 1989, actually had a realistic chance of being re-elected.

**In April 2011, 7 years after joining the EU, 63 per cent of those asked in Poland felt that integration into the European Union offered the country more advantages than disadvantages.**

Prior to Poland taking over the Presidency of the EU Council, the government had also enjoyed the consistent support of the people for its European policies. In April 2011, 7 years after joining the EU, 63 per cent of those asked in Poland felt that integration into the European Union offered the country more advantages than disadvantages. This figure had remained unchanged since 2004. The number of people who believed that integration into the EU offered more advantages than disadvantages to people as individuals also remained constant (42 per cent). In total, 83 per cent of Poles saw themselves as supporters of European integration, another figure that had remained unchanged over the years.<sup>1</sup>

## **PLANNING FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL**

The Polish government was, therefore, in good shape to take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 June 2011. However, the Polish debut was neither made any easier by the worsening global sovereign debt crisis and the associated discussions about the single currency that were raging when it took over the Presidency, nor by the EU reform process that had been going on since the Treaty of Lisbon had come into force, nor by the uprisings by the people against their regimes in countries south of the EU, nor by the obvious lack of true democratic principles amongst their neighbours to the east. However, the government in Warsaw wanted to show that it could be

1 | CBOS: BS/52/2011, Siedem lat obecności Polski w Unii Europejskiej (Seven years of Poland in the European Union), Warsaw, 05/2011, <http://cbos.pl> (accessed 17 Jan 2012).

a successful player on the European stage, a country with good ideas for the future of Europe and with the ability to bring new impetus to the EU machine in Brussels. Therefore, to coincide with assuming the Presidency, the Poles launched a carefully targeted image campaign in Brussels, in the EU Member States and especially in Germany to spread a message of optimism and present Poland as a reliable, well-prepared and responsible member of the EU. The expectations this created were very high.

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The government's obvious preparedness and strong commitment to Europe had an impact back home on the parliamentary elections set for October. Normally, when planning who will take over the Presidency of the EU Council, efforts are made to ensure that the Presidency does not clash with elections in the country in question. This was also the case with Poland, but the early elections in 2007 put a spanner in the works. However, it was decided to stick to the timetable, because changing the order in which countries took on the Presidency of the EU Council seemed just as impractical as holding the elections in Poland early. Also the Sejm, the Polish Parliament, would have had to be dissolved, which would have needed the agreement of the ruling coalition and the opposition – and in light of the notoriously destructive attitude of the opposition PiS party, there was no guarantee that they would agree. Polish planning strategists also believed that it would be better if the Presidency of the EU Council was taken over by a experienced government team and not a team that would be completely changed, or, in the event of an election victory by the Civic Platform, a government team that would have at least some new members. For this reason, it was assumed that the elections for the new Sejm would be held on the latest possible date, so that the old cabinet could continue to take responsibility for the Presidency of the EU Council almost until the end of their term. At first glance, the decision by the Polish President Bronisław Komorowski to choose October 9 as the date for the elections could have been an awkward one. If there were to be a change of government in the middle of the Council Presidency, this could well have a negative impact both on the credibility of Poland's presidency and on its ability

to perform on the EU stage. Having an election campaign during the Presidency of the EU Council also seemed hard to justify, as it would tie up the politicians involved and have a negative effect on the Presidency. It was also clear that the incumbent government would naturally want to use the Council Presidency to present itself in the best possible light to its pro-European electorate. So it was its declared intention to achieve excellent results during its Presidential term, and this would be in its best interests when it came to contesting the elections.

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For Brussels and the EU member states, especially Germany, the potential clash of the elections with the Council Presidency raised another serious question. Would Poland continue the pro-European policies of the Tusk government or would the country revert to slowing down integration, which would be the likely outcome if the opposition PiS party under Jarosław Kaczyński was to win the election?

## **ELECTIONS AND CAMPAIGNING**

On 9 October 2011 around 30.6 million Poles at home and abroad were called upon to vote for 460 members of the Sejm parliament and 100 senators. Four years earlier, on 21 October 2007, the Civic Platform PO under the leadership of Donald Tusk was clear winner over the then ruling party Law and Justice PiS under Jarosław Kaczyński. Since then, the PO (41.1 per cent of the votes) has formed the country's government in a coalition with the Polish People's Party PSL (8.91 per cent of the votes). Both parties are members of the European People's Party. The PiS was the largest opposition party in the Sejm.

Poland's successful economic development during the previous years, the fact that they had come out of the international financial and economic crisis relatively unscathed and the pro-European policies of the Tusk government led many to believe that another election victory for the Civic Platform was on the cards. And yet a few weeks before the elections themselves, there were signs that the ruling PO was starting to become increasingly nervous. Polls were starting to show a steady decline in the PO's comfortable

lead over the opposition PiS. Shortly before the elections, one of the polling and market research institutes, Homo Homini, had the PO on 33.1 per cent and the PiS on 28.1 per cent. Even though polls from other polling organisations put the PO in a better position, there still seemed to be an obvious trend that favoured the PiS and that was taking the wind out of the PO's sails.

Up to this point, it was clear to everybody in Poland that the election campaign was going well for Kaczyński's PiS, but had started very slowly for the PO. Just as Donald Tusk and his fellow campaigners had been able to successfully mobilise young people four years earlier, there was now the threat, from the PO's point of view, that this time it would be the PiS who would manage to gain the votes of the country's young people on Election Day. This was more down to image than policies, with attractive young women surrounding the party's top candidates at every opportunity in order to promote its image and give the party a modern and dynamic veneer. The message was clear: young people, if you want to make a difference and be successful, vote PiS!

Unlike in 2007, Jarosław Kaczyński decided against joining a TV debate with Donald Tusk and pursued a strategy of avoiding open discussions as much as possible. Instead he focused on emotionalising politics and exploiting feelings of jealousy amongst those who were (apparently) not doing quite so well. "Poles deserve more" became the PiS election slogan. As expected, the party concentrated on domestic issues. Even after the official report into the causes of the Smolensk plane crash had been published, conspiracy theories were propounded that suggested that the Russians had conspired to plan and bring about the plane crash with the full knowledge of the Polish government. Kaczyński played on public emotions by enlisting several of the bereaved relatives of the crash victims as candidates for his party. The PiS took every opportunity to advocate a foreign policy that uncompromisingly promoted Polish interests, especially in a Europe dominated by "Merkel's Germany". On the domestic front, the PiS complained that the government was responsible for rising petrol and food costs.

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The PO and Donald Tusk opted to campaign more in the provinces, in order to show that they were close to the people and to win over and mobilise the undecided and non-voters. In this respect, Donald Tusk and the Civic Platform remained true to their normal pragmatic approach.

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The party canvassed on the strength of what it had already achieved and its intention to continue to build on this success in the future. “Poland under construction” and “We do more” were the PO’s election slogans. Tusk openly addressed criticism of his time in office and admitted in a TV election broadcast that mistakes had been made: “We have been creating change in Poland for four years. I know that some things have progressed more slowly than we wanted. But I also know that we are on the right track.”

The main themes of the PO election campaign were innovation, family, security and stabilising the economy. It tried to get across the message that it was a party of political consistency, reliability and trust. One thing that laid it open to attacks by all its political opponents was the huge number of elections promises it had made in 2007 that had created so much expectation but which were now the source of so much potential disappointment, especially as many had either not been fulfilled or had at least not been fully fulfilled. This included around one hundred planned reforms to infrastructure, public services and social systems.

Faced with the PiS party’s growing success in the polls just days before the elections, the ruling coalition seemed to be taken by surprise by the slick campaign of its political opponents, who had gone on a charm offensive to attract voters and who were avoiding discussing the main issues wherever possible. The shift in public opinion towards the PiS might even have maintained its momentum if the party and its leader had been able to continue successfully implementing its strategy of changing its public image and mobilising its traditional supporters all the way up to Election Day. However, in the end this did not succeed. In contrast to the fears of even some of his own supporters, Donald Tusk and his Civic Platform were able to claim a historic victory for Poland. For the first time since the historic

changes of 1989, a Polish government had managed not to lose an election after only one term of office. In line with his election slogan "Poland under construction", the old and now new head of government had been given an opportunity by the electorate to once again, after a delay of four years, tackle the reforms promised in 2007.

## THE ELECTION RESULTS

The Civic Platform won 39.18 per cent of the vote and 206 seats in the new Sejm. This represented only a small loss compared to 2007 and meant that the PO could continue to govern in a coalition with the People's Party, which won 8.36 per cent of the vote and 28 seats. So the two parties have 234 seats between them, which is three more seats than needed for an absolute majority in the Polish parliament. The opposition PiS also suffered a slight loss at the polls, with 158 seats and a 29.89 per cent share of the vote. The big surprise was the radical liberal and anti-clerical Palikot's Movement, which was able to enter the Sejm for the first time with 10.2 per cent of the vote and 40 seats. The post-communist left-wing SLD ended up being the fifth-strongest party in the new parliament, behind the People's Party, with 8.24 per cent of the vote and 27 seats. The "German Minority" electoral committee managed to win one seat in the Sejm, as it had at the previous election. The turnout for the election was only 48.8 per cent.

The PO also emerged as victor in the Senate elections that were held in parallel. The Civic Platform won 64 seats, followed by the PiS with 28 seats and the People's party with two. Seven remaining seats in the new Senate were won by independent candidates.

The PO's results in both Parliament and the Senate turned out to be a significant victory, as the majority of the many voters who remained undecided right up to Election Day voted in the end for continuity and consistency and against political unpredictability. The attempts by the PiS leader Kaczyński to mobilise anti-German sentiment amongst the people in the final weeks of the campaign also failed to have the desired effect. His various allegations

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and insinuations against German Chancellor Angela Merkel were met with rejection, criticism and incomprehension, not only from political commentators, but also from many within his own ranks. For many Polish people, the shots fired during these attacks, which the media liked to portray as “Kaczyński’s Blitzkrieg”, served to create an image of an unpredictable populist, driven by emotions – something that Kaczyński had thus far tried hard to avoid during the rest of his campaign. Given the fact that in October 2011 there was not much political capital to be gained from anti-German sentiment, the opposition leader was no longer in a position to maintain the impetus of his race to catch up, as he now had a serious credibility problem to deal with. The slick campaign designed to attract voters with an understated approach ended with a dramatic unmasking. Kaczyński’s true face was suddenly revealed, and it was not something that the majority wanted.

Looking back, the PO’s election victory appears, on the one hand, to be a vote for the continuation of pragmatic policies. On the other hand, it was also a clear negative vote against Kaczyński and his PiS. Donald Tusk knew this all along. He admitted during the campaign itself that many planned reforms had not taken place and many promises had not been fulfilled. Looking to the future, Tusk declared immediately after his election victory: “I know that the coming four years will also be a significant challenge. In these four years we will need to work twice as hard and twice as fast. The Polish people have a right to a better quality of life and an even better quality of politics. And I am convinced that in the coming four years we can do great and good things for Poland.”

The election results of 9 October 2011 also confirmed the continuing crisis for the left, which has largely disappeared from Polish politics. Meanwhile, with Janusz Palikot and his following, known officially as Ruch Palikota (Palikot’s Movement), a new political force has emerged that preaches anti-clericalism and anti-discrimination. Janusz Palikot’s own provocative and sometimes tasteless public appearances do not seem to have damaged

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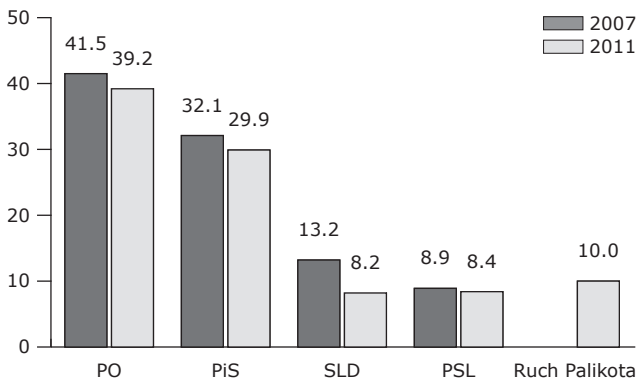
who voted for Palikot, which makes one suspect that the younger generation is changing and now wants to see a more liberal society. Time will tell if these suspicions are founded. What is clear, however, is that Palikot's Movement also feels committed to a more civic idea of society and is pursuing liberal economic policies.

From a German and European perspective, this victory by Donald Tusk and the Civic Platform was also a victory for Europe and German-Polish relations. Not many political commentators want to think about just what kind of damage might have been done by a notoriously Euro-sceptical and Germany-critical Kaczyński government, especially in the current political situation when all eyes are on building Europe's future. It is, therefore, all the more to Donald Tusk's credit that he has been able to convince many of his fellow countrymen, who have often tended towards insularism and anxiety, to agree to a more pro-Europe approach. His government has worked constructively towards finding solutions to Europe's problems, shown initiative and responsibility and worked decisively towards furthering German-Polish relations. This is a good sign for the future and provides the incentive for new initiatives in bilateral cooperation between Germany and Poland.

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Fig. 1

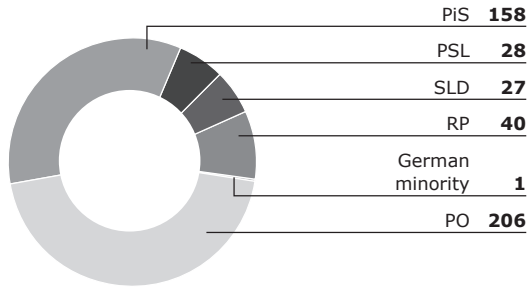
### Election Results 2007 and 2011



Source: State Electoral Commission (Panstwowa Komisja Wyborcza), [www.pkw.gov.pl](http://www.pkw.gov.pl).

Fig. 2

### Share of Seats in the Sejm Following the 2011 Elections



Source: State Electoral Commission (Panstwowa Komisja Wyborcza), [www.pkw.gov.pl](http://www.pkw.gov.pl).

### POLAND'S NEW GOVERNMENT

Donald Tusk, the outgoing and incoming Prime Minister, presented his new government team and made a government policy statement earlier than many had expected, and not on St Nicholas' Day (December 6), as originally intended. The new government then held the traditional first vote of confidence on November 19, which they won, as expected, with 234 votes to 211.

The new Polish government is once again a coalition between the election victors Civic Platform (PO) and the People's Party (PSL). The PSL continues to have four ministers as before, and the party's leader, Waldemar Pawlak, is once again Deputy Prime Minister in addition to being Minister for the Economy. A new Ministry of Administration and Digitization has been set up by making changes to the former Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The new ministry's tasks will include digitization of work processes in state administration, regulation within the areas of communication, post and telecommunications, and matters relating to different denominations and national and ethnic minorities. Michal Boni has been appointed the minister responsible. He was formerly Chief Advisor in the Prime Minister's office. Boni is very popular amongst the people and was once an advisor to Solidarność as well as Minister for Labour and Social Affairs in the government of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (1991).

The Ministry of the Interior is now exclusively responsible for the supervision and coordination of the work of the so-called uniformed services. This includes police, border protection, fire and civil defence services as well as the department for foreign nationals. The new minister Jacek Cichocki is another who has come from the Prime Minister's office, where he coordinated the secret services as Secretary of State. He had formerly been Director of the Centre for Eastern Studies, a government think-tank that analyses political issues in Eastern Europe.

The former Ministry of Infrastructure has become the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Marine Economy. Sławomir Nowak is now the man in charge there. 19 ministers in total have been appointed, of which eleven are new. Donald Tusk has set great store by the fact that his new cabinet is the "youngest government since 1989".

The new ministerial appointments quickly became the source of some controversy. The biggest furore was caused by the appointment of Jarosław Gowin from Cracow as Minister of Justice. Gowin is a humanist and co-founder and dean of the Josef Tischner European

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University in Cracow. Opposition members and political commentators consider him to be ill-prepared to carry out the planned reforms of the justice system because he is not a lawyer. Others take a more positive view and believe that, with his academic background in other areas, he is largely unbiased and unlikely to have any conflicts of interest. The appointment of the new Minister of Justice may also be motivated by the desire to bring into the government a leading representative of the more conservative "Tusk-critical" faction within the PO.

The Minister of Sport, Joanna Mucha, a qualified economist and specialist in the restructuring of healthcare systems, has also had to contend with accusations that she knows little about her future areas of responsibility. Despite her only links to sport being judo, which she does as a hobby, she will be one of the "faces" of the 2012 European Football Championships both at home and abroad, and will have to cope with the diplomatic and representative challenges that this entails.

Another surprise was the appointment of Bartosz Arłukowicz as Minister of Health. Although he wasn't actually a registered party member of the SLD (Alliance of the Left), until six months previously, Arłukowicz had been one of the best-known and most popular politicians within leftist politics. He then switched his allegiance to the Civic Platform, following disagreements with Grzegorz Napieralski, leader of the SLD, who was trying to isolate his rival within the party. This switch of allegiance worked out well for Bartosz Arłukowicz. Following his appointment to Donald Tusk's office as "Minister for Combating Social Exclusion", he fought the election on behalf of the PO in Szczecin, the same constituency as Napieralski, and beat his former rival with four times as many votes.

### **POLITICAL MOTIVES BEHIND THE FORMATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT**

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Donald Tusk largely put together his ministerial team himself, behind closed doors. This gave observers the impression that he alone was in charge of the process. While the Polish Prime Minister continued to stress

that he rated the advice and importance of experts very highly, particularly in their role as advisors to the various ministers, the appointment of the ministers themselves seems to have been based on various political motives, including ensuring the right balance of party interests and safeguarding his own power base. The announcement that any of those appointed who failed to live up to expectations could in future expect to lose their jobs, and the description of his ministers as "shock absorbers" at a time of crisis, were evidence of Tusk's self-confidence and were aimed at critics within his own party.

The aim of safeguarding his power base within the party was helped by the marginalising of Grzegorz Schetyna, one of his early political rivals within the PO. Schetyna is First Vice-Chairman of the PO and was Minister of Internal Affairs from 2007 to 2009 in Tusk's last cabinet and held the position of Marshall of the Sejm up until the elections. However, this central role has now been denied him and he was merely given the position of Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs within the Sejm. Tusk

described him to the press as a “powerful strategic reserve” for the PO. However, in line with the idea of maintaining balance within the party, many of Schetyna’s sympathisers do have central roles within government (Gowin, Mucha, Zdrojewski) or in parliament, such as the PO parliamentary party leader Rafał Grupański.

Because of his strong position, Donald Tusk was also able to reward two of his especially loyal supporters within the parliamentary party. Ewa Kopacz, the former Minister of Health, was appointed Marshall of the Sejm, while the former Minister of Infrastructure, Cezary Grabarczyk, who had come in for a fair amount of criticism, became one of her deputies. The Prime Minister was able to capitalise on the PO’s success, much of which was due to his personal contribution during the election campaign, in order to create a team of his own choosing. This incurred little in the way of opposition or debate, and this team would be responsible for implementing the government’s policies in the months to come.

#### **THE GOVERNMENT’S POLICY STATEMENT AND THE REACTION OF THE OPPOSITION**

Donald Tusk’s government policy statement in 2007 had lasted three hours, but this year it was much shorter in comparison, lasting exactly one hour. In light of the failure to deliver on many of 2007’s promised reforms,

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the public was expecting a speech that was a little less controversial and slightly more general, giving an overview of the current situation and no more than a broad outline of future policies. But Tusk surprised them by putting forward concrete reform proposals. There were no empty phrases, no idle promises, just the announcement of austerity measures and socio-political change. Below are one or two examples of what he had to say.

Family policies would prioritise support for families with several children. Tax write-offs for raising a single child would no longer be given to well-off couples and they would only be able to claim them again if they had more children. For the third child and each one thereafter the write-offs would go up by 50 per cent.

In the area of pensions, the percentage calculation used in the past would be replaced by a fixed increment system that was still to be defined. Employer pension contributions would go up by 2 per cent. In addition, special pension privileges for the 'uniformed services', miners, public prosecutors and judges would be abolished. In the past, 15 years of service was sufficient to be able to claim a full pension. In return, the police would receive higher pay. Perhaps the biggest change to the pension system was the retirement age, which in future would be 67 for both men and women. This reform would be introduced by 2040 for women and by 2020 for men and is in part based on the model used in Germany.

He also announced a reform of the social security and health insurance system for farmers. In future, farmers would also have to pay into the health system and, from 2013, into the general government tax and pension system as well. Smallholders (less than 15 hectares of land) would, however, continue to be supported by the state. Reforms relating to the legal system would include reducing the

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length of legal proceedings, doing away with many of the different professional licenses required (e.g. for lawyers) and the simplification of many administrative procedures (e.g. for obtaining building permits). There was no mention in the policy statement about the country's oft-discussed potential membership of the eurozone, or about infrastructure, education, culture or health.

The leader of the PiS, Kaczyński, announced that his party was rejecting this government programme on account of the social dislocation that the reforms would cause. It was clear from Kaczyński's demeanour that the PiS saw itself as fundamentally opposed to the government and would not be offering it any support. Palikot's Movement and the SLD, who were considered potential coalition partners for the PO before the election, also criticised the programme as being socially unbalanced, but were prepared to support certain initiatives. To many Polish economic commentators, the government's policy statement sent a clear message to the financial markets and the government's willingness to undertake reforms was generally positively received.

However, the policy statement from the newly-elected Prime Minister clearly came as something of an unpleasant surprise to the majority of the Polish people. The PO's popularity has dropped by 8 per cent according to the latest opinion polls<sup>2</sup>, a very unusual result for a party so soon after an election victory. In light of this, and in light of the strong objections raised by the opposition and many social organisations, it may well be difficult for the government to carry out all the reforms it has announced. Added to this is the fact that a majority of 10 votes in the Polish parliament is not that big a number when we consider that it is not unusual for members to move around between political camps, something that the PO has been able to benefit from in the past. Donald Tusk will not always be able to count on the largest opposition party, the PiS, continuing to be affected by internal divisions as they were after the elections, something which effectively hamstrung the parliamentary opposition at the time. Quite the opposite, the strict austerity and reform measures put forward by the government should actually help to strengthen Kaczyński in the battle with his critics inside the party and put the members of the breakaway mini-faction "United Poland" on the defensive.

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### **POLAND'S PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL – WHICH HOPES HAVE BEEN REALISED?**

The election campaign back home had no real negative effect on the Polish Presidency of the EU Council. The EU Council Presidency played no significant role in the election campaign, nor did any of Poland's internal political agendas end up being played out on the Brussels stage. Those involved in the Polish Presidency were always on hand and carried out their duties in a quiet, effective and measured way and with a great deal of success.

Poland took over the EU Presidency on 1 July 2011, at a time when the European sovereign debt crisis was becoming much more obvious and much more serious. The ongoing discussions on the appropriate measures needed to save the single currency were increasingly starting to

dominate the Brussels agenda. What practical, positive contribution could the Presidency actually make in this context when it was led by a country that was not part of the eurozone? The attention of the European public at that time was focused on the upheavals in the Maghreb and the suppression of the opposition in the Ukraine and Belarus. Against this background, the Polish EU Presidency concentrated on three main issues:

- European integration as a source of growth and prosperity;
- Secure Europe;
- Europe benefiting from openness.<sup>3</sup>

The Polish Council Presidency got under way in July with discussions on long-term EU budget forecasts, with the aim of further developing the single market and improving Europe's competitiveness. The agreement reached at the beginning of December on a common patent law after thirty years of discussions and arguments can be seen as a great success. It will now be easier for businesses to register patents in the whole of the EU and so save significant amounts of money. In this context, the first ever single market forum in Cracow in October 2011 was very useful for networking.

The Polish Presidency was characterised by efforts to make sure other people's points of view were clearly understood in discussions and, where possible to bring those points of view more in line with each other, without always trying to reach binding agreements. A good example of this was the meeting organised in Brussels in October to discuss the EU budget. For the first time in EU history, Member States, national parliaments and EU institutions were able to put forward their views in a non-binding way and get involved in discussions to understand each other's positions. This made it possible for the budget discussions to get down to the business at hand relatively quickly and made it easier for all those involved to express their reservations and ideas. In terms of the EU economy, Poland could consider

3 | Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland), „Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union”, [http://pl2011.eu/sites/default/files/users/shared/o\\_prezydencja/programme\\_of\\_the\\_polish\\_presidency\\_of\\_the\\_council\\_of\\_the\\_eu.pdf](http://pl2011.eu/sites/default/files/users/shared/o_prezydencja/programme_of_the_polish_presidency_of_the_council_of_the_eu.pdf) (accessed 17 Jan 2011).



it a great success that the so-called six-pack was finally adopted after long and often tough negotiations. The package of six laws and regulations is designed to bring more discipline to national budgets.

Because Poland is not in the eurozone, the Polish role in dealing with the current sovereign debt crisis was naturally somewhat limited. There was a certain amount of disillusionment, both within the Polish team in Brussels and amongst the Polish public back home, when they were faced with the reality of the fact that the Polish Finance Minister was not allowed to attend Eurogroup meetings, despite the country's role as the Council President. In light of Poland's growing commitment to Europe and its awareness of its responsibilities, it soon became clear that the disadvantages of not belonging to the "Euro Club" far outweighed any concerns they might have about membership. Poland was at least able to act as a facilitator in the discussions on how to save the euro and deal with the sovereign debt crisis, and showed itself to be a credible advocate of better budget discipline and a spokesman for all those Member States who believe that a Europe of different speeds would be a mistake.

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As regards a "secure Europe", Poland had announced that it would be looking to progress the work on a new energy strategy for the next ten years. At the end of November, after two years of discussions, Poland was able to secure an agreement on external energy sources. A document was agreed that would regulate the position the EU would take when dealing with third countries. This strengthened the role of the European Commission and a statement of intent was drawn up for the adoption of common positions at international forums.

The Polish Presidency was not able to push through the "civil-military headquarters" project, an initiative originally proposed by the Weimar Triangle,<sup>4</sup> due to opposition from the United Kingdom. There was some limited success, however, in that the remaining 26 EU states, especially

4 | Cf. Claudia Major, "Ein zivil-militärisches Hauptquartier für die EU", *SWP-Aktuell* 74, 10/2010, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP).

Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland itself, agreed that they wanted to continue working on the idea.

With the motto "Open Europe", the Polish Presidency took this to mean supporting the expansion process, especially in southern Europe, and furthering cooperation with neighbouring countries to the east (Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). While the EU continued to defer granting full EU candidate status to Serbia because there were still some question marks over tensions in the Serbia-Kosovo relation, the Polish Council Presidency can take credit for formally concluding the negotiations on Croatia's entry into the EU. The Croatian EU Accession Treaty was signed, amongst much celebration, on 9 December 2011 – not in Warsaw, as the Polish had hoped, but in Brussels.

**Because of a lack of willingness on the part of Belarus and the Ukraine to undertake comprehensive democratic reforms, the results of the Warsaw summit were well below Poland's possibly over-optimistic expectations.**

The initial hope of the Polish Presidency was that the Warsaw summit of September 29 and 30 would produce groundbreaking results in terms of the Eastern Partnership project.

The summit was meant to give a clear signal that the EU was interested in more intensive cooperation with its eastern neighbours. However, because of a lack of willingness on the part of Belarus and the Ukraine to undertake comprehensive democratic reforms, the results of the summit were well below Poland's possibly over-optimistic expectations. The legal proceedings against Julia Tymoszenko, which were still awaiting a verdict at the end of September, and the Belarus delegation's refusal to attend, dominated the summit.

After much negotiation, the final declaration offered the EU's neighbours to the east the prospect of more investment and an easing of visa requirements, under the proviso that progress must be made on democracy, but there was no mention in the document about potential membership of the EU. The verdict against Tymoszenko that was announced shortly after, together with her declining health, actually led to the initialling of the Association Agreement with the Ukraine being suspended, despite the fact that it was complete. Despite Polish efforts, this was a temporary set-back for one of the important stated aims of the Polish Presidency.

## OUTLOOK

For the most part, the Polish Council Presidency went very smoothly and was carried out in a highly professional manner. Not much more could have been expected of Poland, given the limitations imposed by the Lisbon Treaty and the ongoing crisis management measures to save the euro which dominated the European political agenda at the time. The general impression of Polish efforts was overwhelmingly positive.

As a result of creating this good impression, Poland is one step closer to Donald Tusk's vision of positioning the country as a leading EU Member State which is constructively involved in the affairs of the Union, which accepts responsibility for helping to promote the EU as a whole, and which wants to be fully involved in all European issues. The Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, painted a similar picture in his speech in Berlin on November 28. His call for more Europe, his recommendations for reforms that will be discussed well beyond the end of the Polish Council Presidency, and his call to Germany to take on the responsibility for leading Europe, combined with a reminder to always keep Poland alongside them, did not just arise out of genuine concerns about the future of European integration. They were also an expression of Poland's traditional need for security, which for the Tusk government and its supporters is most likely to be guaranteed by European integration. Even though not all politicians in Poland take the government line, as was seen in the violent, polemical reaction of the PiS opposition to Sikorski's speech, there is at least a debate on Europe going on in a neighbouring country, one in which German-Polish partnership in an ever-more integrated Europe is likely to play an increasingly important role. A great opportunity currently exists for the two countries to form a partnership which will help to shape the EU. However, this is only likely to happen if Germany is prepared to include Poland in the decision-making process on the future of the eurozone and the EU itself.